Regional Ambulance Meeting

Town of Freedom, Town Hall

Monday, September 30, 2019

Present at the meeting were the following:

Town of Freedom: Selectmen Leslie Babb, Ernest Day, Jr., Alan Fall; Fire Chief Robert Cunio; and, Janice Zecher, Administrative Assistant.

Town of Madison: Selectmen John Arruda, Josh Shackford, Bill Lord; and, Michael Brooks, Assistant Fire Chief.

Town of Effingham: Selectmen Michael Cahalane, Chuck Fuller, John Meisner; and, Dan Felix, Fire Capt.

Town of Eaton: Selectmen Ed Reilly, Dick Fortin; and, Glenn Merrill, Center Conway-Eaton Fire Chief.

Town of Ossipee: Selectmen’s Representative Richard Morgan, Ossipee Corner Fire Chief Adam Riley, West Ossipee Fire Chief Carl Huddleston and, Center Ossipee Fire Chief Dana Cullen, Jr.

Town of Tamworth: Selectman Rebecca Mason, Willie Farnham; and, Zach Remick, Fire Ward.

Media: Daymond Steer, Conway Daily Sun, and, Tim Hughes, Madison TV.

Action Ambulance: Chris Hogan, Jason Lafebvre, Brian Gleason, John S. Hatch, and, Joseph Simone.

CarePlus Ambulance: John Poirier, Eric Damon, Newell Bailey, and, Scott Quilty.

Public: Paul Elie, and, Bill Elliott.

Chairman Fortin called the meeting to order at 6:00pm.

Chairman Fortin apologized for any confusion after the last meeting. He stated that he called all of the ambulance providers to ensure that they were properly informed.

Chairman Fortin confirmed that he had spoken with Stephen Buckley, Esquire at NHMA regarding the RSA 91-A questions from last meeting and that conversation was memorialized in a memo that was emailed to all participating Towns. The conclusion was that contract negotiations must be conducted in public session.

Chairman Fortin explained why Selectmen Babb was quoted in the newspaper. The reporter had tried to contact him but he did not have a cell phone. The reporter was able to reach Selectmen Babb and, therefore, quoted his statement.

Chairman Fortin stated the order of preference for negotiations going forward: 1) Action Ambulance; 2) CarePlus Ambulance; and, 3) Brewster Ambulance. He explained that there would be no further action with Life Star EMS.

It was discussed that the Fire Chiefs in attendance would be permitted to ask questions of the providers after the Selectmen have completed their questions.

**Question and Answer Period with Action Ambulance**

John Hatch was the primary presenter for Action Ambulance.

Rick Morgan:

1. General question on staffing; How they will cover the shifts? Number of staff they intend to employ? How they will deal with problems ensuring all shifts get filled?

* Started by looking at the salary and benefits that they intended to offer. Employee engagement is very important to them.
* They intend to use full-time employees, primarily. They will have per diem personnel available to fill in.
* They looked at the pay scales of six ambulance companies in New Hampshire as well as the two hospital systems that they will be working with.
* They intend to stay with their present pay scale as they are currently paying approximately $1.50 more per hour than the present wages in this area.
* They intend to ensure that their employees are well equipped to accomplish their duties and will have stock on hand at their base locations to permit their employees to re-stock the ambulances without delay.
* AEMTs will work a 48 hour per week schedule with built-in overtime.
* Paramedics will work a 40 hour per week schedule.
* They have started preliminary recruiting efforts and have 8-10 interested parties from this area.
* They do intend to bring personnel in to work.
* They plan to have a job fair to attract personnel.
* They currently employ four personnel who live in this area for their other services.
* They are giving a 2.3% raise this year and have forecasted a similar annual increase going forward.
* They feel that they need to hire 2 AEMTs and 4 Paramedics to satisfy this contract.

1. They were asked to expand upon their experience with Portsmouth Regional Hospital.

* Provided analysis of pay-back statistics.
* Memorial Hospital just switched over to EPIC system. They supplied them with call data for the past 18 months.

1. As this contract will amount to a subsidy of a private company with public funds, they were asked to discuss their business practices and how we can be assured that we are making a sound expenditure of public funds.

* Their CFO was not able to attend the meeting and they respectfully deferred their response to this inquiry until such time as he could attend and provide the necessary response.
* This subject will be revisited at a future meeting.

1. Patients have strong opinions about which hospital they want to be transported to. How will this issue be addressed? And, how will the choice of hospital affect the bill?

* Mileage to the chosen hospital would be the only variable in determining the amount of the bill.

1. Is there a way to standardize the billing so that the charge would be the same for all hospitals?

* Mileage would still be a variable.
* Medicare will pay $7.55 per mile.
* They understand that a certain number of patients will not be able to pay the bill.
* They estimated: 40% on Medicare; 10% on Medicaid; and, 50% commercial or private insurance.
* They are prepared to make hardship considerations.

1. There is a fear that balance billing will drive people to self-transport because they cannot afford to pay for an ambulance.

* People still do not know what is available to them for insurance.
* They have an out-reach program through their billing department to assist with insurance questions.
* They have a hardship form that will be provided.
* Their goal is to avoid formal collections procedures.

1. How do you envision the use of ambulances at stand-by events (e.g., fireworks displays, parades, etc.)? How will Towns be billed?

* No cost at all if duty ambulance is used and they are able to respond from the event to other calls.
* They characterize such events as “community partnership events” and they want to be present and have their personnel visible in the communities.
* Unless a dedicated ambulance is required for a specific purpose, there would likely be no charge to the Town.
* It was discussed that perhaps each Town could be allowed a specific number of such events at no charge each year.

Selectman Babb:

He began by stating that he had spoken with a number of former employees of Action Ambulance who all spoke very positively of their experiences working for Action.

1. Is there an average cost per transport?

* There is but it is dependent upon the level of care provided.
* A BLS transport from Freedom Town Hall to Memorial Hospital would be billed $1,233.75. After insurance, the patient would be billed $109.00.
* They are very aggressive with automobile insurance companies. Their goal is to be paid 100% by the insurance companies and have their patients pay as little as possible out-of-pocket.
* An ALS patient on Medicare would be charged $3,516.00. They would collect $194.00 from Medicare and the patient would not be billed.

Selectman Cahalane:

1. Can you describe the fleet of vehicles that you will use to satisfy this contract? Any special equipment?

* Their average employee has been employed with the company for 12 years.
* They intend to bring 2 Type I Dodge units with Cummins diesel motors, four-wheel drive, on-board generators, equipped for proper firefighter rehabilitation. One of these will be the Paramedic truck.
* They intend to bring a Type II van unit that they custom built on a four-wheel drive chassis.
* They intend to bring in an F-350 pickup with cap to be utilized as a Paramedic intercept vehicle and will transport firefighter rehabilitation supplies and equipment.

1. How reliable are the satellite phones that you discussed in your presentation?

* 100% tested. Very reliable.
* Will have units for all locations and vehicles in this area.
* Their company leadership utilize them to ensure that they are always available to be contacted when necessary.

1. How do you feel about quarterly meetings to discuss contract performance?

* Very strongly.
* Sees the relationship as a community partnership and they want to be active participants.
* See themselves as an extension of the local EMS system.
* They prepare performance reports for the municipalities that they serve. They showed a sample report from the Town of Winthrop, Massachusetts.
* They can prepare these reports as often as we want them, or not at all.
* The will self-debrief their personnel on serious incidents. They are prepared to conduct formal debriefs for all responders with participation from Emergency Room personnel. Dr. Dunn at Memorial is very interested in this format.

1. What will you provide for joint training opportunities?

* HAZMAT awareness
* Active shooter situations
* They feel that it is extremely important to collaborate in order to plan and prepare for future events.

1. What do you offer for certification programs?

* They provide an active training center which has been certified by the State of New Hampshire.
* They plan to award 2 scholarships per town per year for high school students looking to pursue a career in EMS.
* The offer CPR and other community events.
* They have a 99% pass rate through their program.
* They run a traditional EMT course Tuesdays, Thursdays and every other Saturday for an 8-month period.
* They run a condensed 6-week program Monday through Thursday 8-4 for members of the fire service who require certification for current employment.
* They are eager to put together custom courses based upon what we need in this area.
* Their ordinary training offers more than enough credits for personnel to re-certify annually.
* They do not offer a certification program for Paramedics but they are able to re-certify existing Paramedics.
* They do offer EMT and AEMT certification courses.
* No charge to member towns for personnel enrolled in courses.
* No charge for continuing education credits.

1. Asked to discuss the mass casualty response capabilities and whether the specialized equipment would be responding from their base in Massachusetts.

* They plan to have trailers equipped with the necessary supplies at their local bases.
* Their major incident unit could respond, and would if needed, but would require 2 hours to respond from Massachusetts base location.

1. What is your present ability to jump in and provide service at our existing contracted levels if the current provider were to walk away from the contract?

* They have done their homework, and they have the prior experience necessary to step in.
* They could be up and running in 2 days, if needed, at our present level.
* Prepared to fulfill new contract within 30-60 days.

Selectman Arruda:

1. What is the build-out time for new vehicles from the award of contract?

* The previously described vehicles are currently owned and ready to provide service.
* They have researched with vendors for the build-out of new vehicles. 4 months for box units and 6 months for van units.

Selectman Mason:

1. Who will make the call regarding the level of service for the ambulance response?

* They are comfortable with the EMD at the Carroll County Dispatch Center making the call.

1. How do you deal with local personnel pressed into service to assist you in patient care and/or transports? Who assumes liability for their actions?

* Local personnel assisting would be covered by Action’s insurance policy.
* They are willing to work with the Towns on the issue of compensation.
* This will require more in-depth discussion.

1. Do you track call-offs (when local EMS cancels your response)?

* Yes
* Entire response is tracked and documented from the time of the initial tone through their return to quarters. The statistics are very important.

1. Are you prepared to provide Paramedic intercepts?

* Yes

1. How do you intend to re-supply the ambulances? Through the hospitals or at your base locations?

* They have worked out a 1 for 1 with Memorial Hospital. And they are set up to resupply any medications through Memorial Hospital.
* They are still in conversations with Huggins Hospital on similar arrangements.

1. Are you prepared to work with the Carroll County Coalition for Public Health?

* Discussed the capabilities that they offer.
* Working with such groups enhances their ability to recertify their memberships in professional associations.

Selectman Fuller:

1. How do you manage the dress code for your employees?

* Bosses are like co-workers; all are co-equal in importance to the company.
* Feels that uniforms and professional appearance are important to their public image.
* They are the best at “toilet bowl management” meaning that they would never ask an employee to do something that they have not done themselves.
* Important to make a professional appearance for patients. Appearance creates an expectation for the level of service that you will provide.

1. Why such a large umbrella insurance policy?

* Want to ensure that they can take care of their employees.
* Always prepared.
* Have in-house legal counsel to defend employees.
* Happy employees are important to them.
* Proof is in the pudding.
* Their employees like where they work and they have fun. Good environment.

Rick Morgan:

1. Each Town will be listed as additional insured parties on your policy?

* Yes.

Selectman Farnham:

1. What is your plan to provide vehicle maintenance for vehicles utilized in this area?

* Plan to work with Advance Diesel on Brandywine Road for local service.
* Their head mechanic has met with them and grilled them on procedures and they are comfortable with the relationship.

1. What type of benefits package will you offer to your employees?

* The offer to options for health insurance: a traditional PPO and a lesser plan with higher deductibles for the younger/healthier employees. They will pay 75% of the premium.
* Pharmacy plan
* Dental plan
* Vision plan
* 401(k)
* Paid vacation and sick time
* 8 paid holidays
* Personal awards, service pins to recognize performance and longevity with the company
* Annual gifts to employees and special events.

Adam Riley, Chief, Ossipee Corner Fire Department:

1. Will there be extra trucks in this area to cover during busy times?

* Plan to have 2 backup ambulances

1. Do you have any mechanical CPR devices?

* Not yet

Rob Cunio, Chief, Freedom Fire Department:

1. Will four-wheel drive vehicles be replaced in kind when the time comes?

* Yes

1. What is the cost to attend EMT classes?

* No cost for community partners.

1. Who will monitor the “call” staff and ensure that they are up to respond?

* There will be a manager on-site.

1. How will you deal will multiple simultaneous Paramedic calls?

* Plan to work with all area agencies as needed.

1. Are your personnel trained in ICS? And, do they follow it?

* Yes.
* ICS 100/700 are required.

Adam Riley, Chief, Ossipee Corner Fire Department:

* Wanted the provider to be aware that there are properties in his response area that you will need a smaller ambulance in order to access.
* He specifically mentioned the Sally Port at the Carroll County Jail.

Dan Felix, Captain, Effingham Fire Department:

1. What are the ages of the vehicles that you intend to use in the performance of the contract?

* The 2 Dodge units are each 7 years old.
* They have a total of 42 ambulances in their current fleet.

That was the conclusion of the questions for the night.

Rick Morgan made a MOTION to recommend to the Boards of Selectmen that they move forward with formal contract negotiations with Action Ambulance. Selectman Farnham SECONDED the MOTION.

There was no discussion.

By a show of hands, the MOTION passed unanimously.

The Selectmen’s Meeting Schedules are as follows:

* Ossipee Selectmen meet on Monday, October 7, 2019;
* Effingham Selectmen meet on Wednesday, October 1, 2019;
* Tamworth Selectmen meet on Thursday, October 3, 2019;
* Freedom Selectmen meet following this meeting;
* Eaton Selectmen meet on Tuesday, October 8, 2019; and,
* Madison Selectmen meet on Tuesday, October 8, 2019.

Based upon the need for all Boards of Selectmen to meet and vote, and the Observance of Columbus Day and Canadian Thanksgiving Day on Monday, October 14, 2019, the next meeting of the Joint Board will be held Monday, October 21, 2019 at 6:00 PM at the Freedom Town Hall.

Selectman Cahalane brought up the issue of the potential need for a formal Inter-Municipal Agreement, as was mentioned by Steve Buckley from NHMA.

* The consensus was that an Inter-Municipal Agreement was not necessary because the party Towns do not have any performance obligation under the contract.

Selectman Arruda questioned whether a quorum of each Town’s Board of Selectmen was required for such a motion and for the negotiations going forward.

* The consensus was that a quorum was not necessary for the negotiation process.
* It was discussed that the execution of the contract should be done as it was in the past with all Selectmen present and signing the same night.
* Once signed, the contract would be subject to appropriation of funds at each Town’s Annual Meeting.

There being no further discussion, Selectman Cahalane made a MOTION to adjourn. Selectman Fuller SECONDED the MOTION.

All were in favor.

Meeting adjourned at 7:35 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Michael R. Brooks

Madison, Assistant Fire Chief